



(U) InSIDer's View of History: The Adventure Continues -- Evacuation from Belgrade

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(S//SI//REL) Note from SIGINT Communications: Last week we ran one of [REDACTED] [adventures](#) from when he worked in the field for the Special Collection Service (SCS). This is the other:

(TS//SI) After two exciting and educational years in Moscow we moved on to a much quieter and more civilized assignment in Milan, Italy. The living was good and the work, though rewarding, never presented the challenges we faced in Moscow. Our next assignment, Belgrade, would turn out to be more like Moscow than Milan.

(U) Belgrade at this time was an exciting and interesting place. Local politics were in a state of turmoil and the local population became more and more dissatisfied with the national government as time progressed. Anti-government demonstrators were marching through the city every day. As long as the marchers didn't venture into certain areas of the city, there was minimal police interference.

(TS//SI) The main mission of the SCS site was to monitor events in Bosnia, particularly the Serbian conclave there. We had excellent access and were producing numerous transcripts locally as well as forwarding a huge volume of intercept to the Balkans Division at NSA. As the situation worsened in the Kosovo Region of Serbia the site's focus shifted, especially when accusations of atrocities were made against Serbian forces in the region. The site also had good access into this region and continued to provide time-sensitive reporting to U.S. officials at the embassy.

(TS//SI) The U.S. government entered into negotiations with Slobodan Milosevic to try to find a solution to the Kosovo situation. Richard Holbrooke was the primary U.S. negotiator and was an avid reader of the site's material. Following months of promises made and promises broken, Mr. Holbrooke presented a final proposal to Slobodan Milosevic that, if rejected, would lead to international intervention. Milosevic deferred acceptance of the proposal to the national parliament knowing that they would reject it. By this time, all but essential embassy personnel had been evacuated. There were about ten American officers, including two SCS members, left at the embassy as well as the Marine Security Guard Detachment. The site had been working 18-20 hour days for more than a week at this point.

(TS//SI) After presenting the proposal, Mr. Holbrooke returned to the embassy to watch the parliamentary debate on Serbian television. Most of what was left of the Embassy staff watched along with him as the proposal was soundly rejected. Mr. Holbrook



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quickly left for the airport where a plane was waiting to return him to Washington. We waited for word from the State Department to begin our final destruction and evacuate the Embassy. It didn't take long for that word to come. Two of us destroyed the site's equipment, about \$6 million worth, in a little over six hours. Other embassy officers were doing the same thing in their offices.

(U//FOUO) After a long night we met in the embassy garage at 5 A.M. A convoy of armored vehicles took us to the airport to board a U.S. Navy C-9 that was waiting to evacuate us to Budapest. The Marines with us were fully armed. Nobody was sure what to expect from the local government, but we made it to the airport with no hindrances and safely left the country. Our drivers, locals known as Foreign Service Nationals (FSN), were not so lucky: when they left the airport they were chased all of the way back to the embassy.

(TS//SI) The U.S. started bombing the country later that same day. Many of the embassy FSNs left their country, going first to Hungary and then as refugees to the U.S. Some of them stayed in the U.S., but others returned to Belgrade following the fall of the Milosevic government.

(U) My wife and I, after a week in Budapest, evacuated to the U.S. where we spent three months before going on to our next assignment. All of the personal effects that we had with us in Belgrade were lost, though we did get a handful of things back after the embassy reopened two years later.

(TS//SI) Most everybody who has spent time with SCS in the field has similar stories. We are at the very forward tip of the SIGINT enterprise to support national policymakers in whatever way we can. We work wherever necessary, be it Baghdad or Paris, sometimes leaving our families behind, sometimes having them with us. The work isn't always exciting and the living conditions vary tremendously, but we all have the satisfaction of seeing first hand how the product of our efforts is put to use. We know many of our customers personally and always try to give them our best.

(U//FOUO) See other editions of *InSIDer's View of History* :

- [A Lesson in Personal Accountability](#)
- [How a Four Star General Once Waited for a Lowly Captain to Finish Eating Lunch](#)
- [In SHAPE, In France](#)
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(U//FOUO) Do YOU have a story to tell? We want to hear it! Please see [the kickoff article](#) for details.

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